

“Re-Entry” of Students

An Overview of Issues Surrounding the Return of Students to Public Schools after Treatment for Alcohol/Drug Abuse, Psychiatric Problems, Transitory Lifestyles, or Incarceration in Juvenile or DYS Facilities

Friendship 7 had splashed into the Atlantic about 40 miles short of the predicted area, as retrofire calculations had not taken into account the spacecraft's weight loss in consumables. The Noa, a destroyer code-named Steelhead, had spotted the spacecraft during its descent. From a distance of about six miles the destroyer radioed Glenn that it could reach him shortly. Seventeen minutes later, the Noa cruised alongside; a sailor smartly cleared the spacecraft antenna; and Boatswain's Mate David Bell deftly attached a davit line for pickup. During the hoist upward the spacecraft bumped solidly against the side of the destroyer. Once Friendship 7 was lowered to the mattress pallet, Glenn began removing paneling, intending to leave the capsule through the upper hatch. But it was too hot, and the operation was too slow for the already long day. So he told the ship's crew to stand clear, carefully removed the hatch detonator, and hit the plunger with the back of his hand. The plunger recoiled, cutting Glenn's knuckles slightly through his glove and giving him the only injury he received during the whole mission. A loud report indicated that the hatch was off. Eager hands pulled out the smiling astronaut, whose first words were "It was hot in there."

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John Glenn was the first American to orbit the Earth. His “re-entry” was planned before he first entered the Mercury spacecraft. His successful return, much like the re-entry of students back into the public school system, was made possible with detailed planning, a dedicated re-entry team, and exacting, follow-up monitoring. Recently, the success/failure of students re-entering school systems has been a topic of research and discussion among the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, Mental Health and Social Services and several public school districts. Following is a synopsis of those discussions.

1. Students entering or re-entering a school system often don't fit in or are not successful and either dropout or cause disruptions. In one Missouri district, of 89 high-school students who enrolled late (after school had officially started), only 40 remained in school at the end of the first semester. In another district, only 10 of 17 high-school students returning from a Division of Youth Services facility were successful in staying in school for the remainder of the year. Districts report similar problems for students who re-enter from private psychiatric treatment, court-ordered placement in juvenile facilities, foster home placements, and out-of-school suspensions. Students may need peer/study groups, mentors and a concerned teacher to advocate for them. Re-entry students often don't ask for help; they will probably need a support system.

2. According to research, there are several reasons that returning students do not stay in school. Those reasons range from the student's lack of desire to learn, to peer group pressure, to intellectual impairment. **The leading reasons for the lack of success for returning students are: lack of family support, substance abuse and academic/school-related problems.** Schools report that students who “show up” at mid-term have difficulty reintegrating.

3. In order to increase success, planning for re-integration, transition or re-entry needs to be undertaken by all the parties involved prior to the student's return. If students are to return from an adjudicated setting the school should be notified of a return date and plans to transition the student should be made by all parties. Information sharing is a must! Schools and support agencies should exchange information and student records so that services are not duplicated or denied.

4. While resources such as mental health/counselor support, adequate numbers of deputy juvenile officers and support services are not equally available to all districts, some schools do not use research-based findings for decision-making and tend to rely on or continue using strategies that do not lead to successful re-entry. **A service/support/care team consisting of an administrator, counselor, teacher/sponsor, nurse, parent/guardian, and appropriate individuals from the outside agency should confer on the best program for the re-entering student.** Large districts may need a point person to serve as the primary contact for students/agencies involved in reintegration. Peer support groups or mentoring programs may need to be established.
5. **Face-to-face contact with service providers is essential.** Deputy juvenile officers, case managers, and family service providers may each be involved in the student's re-entry. Meeting people personally best develops trust and assists with communication issues.
6. **Parental support and family therapy may be needed.** Since family problems often lead to a lack of success, a school-based social worker and/or a good relationship with other service providers may be necessary. High-school students may need support in finding appropriate clothing, shelter and basic essentials.
7. Community attitude/awareness may prohibit schools from fully serving students. **Restitution, forgiveness and starting-over needs are crucial parts to the successful return of students into the school and social community.** Restorative justice programs or community service projects may allow students to repair the harm and pay back the community, school or persons involved in the wrongdoing. Mentoring projects or school-to-work projects may help some students feel needed and important in the lives of others.
8. **Professional development for adults working with difficult students is a must.** From the classroom teacher who may need alternative strategies in dealing with discipline to intensive training in spotting mental illnesses, educators must be aware of the issues that impact the lives of their students. Some staff members may need to change their attitudes about acceptance of re-entering students. Successful practices need to be shared with other professionals and expert opinions should be sought. Conferences dealing with at-risk students, presentations to administrator groups and organizations such as juvenile justice associations are good places to share best practices.
9. While the up-front cost of student re-entry may appear high, the long-term cost of incarceration (approximately \$30,000 annually) and the loss of productivity are higher. **Schools may utilize funding from Line 14, Medicaid, Title I, Vocational At-Risk or Safe School grants to help address the costs associated with a re-entry program.** Other funding sources might include court diversion funds or grants from mental health or public safety agencies. According to University of Missouri-Kansas City Professor Gerald L. Miller, over 82 percent of incarcerated people are high-school dropouts; Missouri has over 28,000 people in prison. Another example of the economic impact of keeping students in school is that, according to Miller, a female, high-school graduate will earn \$6,900 more each year than a drop-out. If that female worked from the age of 20 to the age of 67 (projected retirement age) she would earn \$900,000 more than a high-school dropout.
10. **Evaluation/assessment of re-entry programs is essential.** A school must closely look at statistics to see who the students are that need to be served and continually modify the services it provides. There is no one-size-fits-all model that will work in every situation. Some districts find that placement in an alternative setting is appropriate for returning students while others find that

students need to return to the “regular” school setting but have an opportunity to buddy with a peer for social support. In some cases, computer-assisted programs can help students to recover lost credit while in other cases re-entering students may need career counseling while pursuing their academic courses through the GED Options program.

In summary, these are the elements that need to be examined in any re-entry program to ensure success for students coming back to school:

- Students entering or re-entering a school system often don’t fit in or are not successful and either dropout or cause disruptions.
- The leading reasons for the lack of success for returning students are: lack of family support, substance abuse and academic/school-related problems.
- In order to increase success, planning for re-integration, transition or re-entry needs to be undertaken by all the parties involved prior to the student’s return.
- A service/support/care team consisting of an administrator, counselor, teacher/sponsor, nurse, parent/guardian, and appropriate individuals from the outside agency should confer on the best program for the re-entering student.
- Face-to-face contact with service providers is essential.
- Parental support and family therapy may be needed.
- Restitution, forgiveness and starting-over needs are crucial parts to the successful return of students into the school and social community.
- Professional development for adults working with difficult students is a must.
- Schools may utilize funding from Line 14, Medicaid, Title I, Vocational At-Risk, or Safe School grants to help address the costs associated with a re-entry program.
- Evaluation/assessment of re-entry programs is essential.

Following are resources about re-entry and associated topics:

- U.S. Department of Justice – federal grant opportunity to develop re-entry models for youth and adults. Due May 15, 2002.

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry>

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/reentry/conduct.html>

- National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) database of abstracts

<http://www.abstractsdb.ncjrs.org/content>

- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs – information about re-entry

http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_02_1/corr.html

- Division of Vocational and Adult Education – GED Options Program, 573-522-1775

- Division of School Improvement – Safe Schools Grants, 573-751-9094

<http://www.dese.state.mo.us>